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CONSIDERATION OF PLANS AND PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES AND THE UTILIZATION OF THEIR MARINE AND COASTAL RESOURCES, WHICH INCLUDES MEETING ESSENTIAL HUMAN NEEDS, MAINTAINING BIODIVERSITY, AND IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ISLAND PEOPLE, AS WELL AS MEASURES THAT WILL ENABLE SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES TO COPE EFFECTIVELY, CREATIVELY AND IN A SUSTAINABLE MANNER WITH ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES AND TO MITIGATE THE IMPACTS ON AND REDUCE THE THREATS POSED TO MARINE AND COASTAL RESOURCES

Proposals for a Barbados declaration

Note by the Secretary-General

In its decision 18 (see A/48/36/Add.2, sect. VII), the Preparatory Committee for the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States requested the Secretary-General to transmit the text containing proposals for a Barbados declaration (A/CONF.167/PC/L.10) to the Conference for its consideration and appropriate action. The text is annexed to the present note.

* A/CONF.167/1.

ANNEX

Proposals for a Barbados declaration

In the wake of the decisions of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, human society is poised on the threshold of a new era of great promise which can best be fulfilled through new and innovative forms of partnership between and among peoples. Such new arrangements must find reflection in local communities which so profoundly shape peoples lives, in States which so poignantly influence their destinies, and in the relations between States which so importantly determine international action affecting the realization of peoples' aspirations for a "healthy and productive life in harmony with nature". Fulfilment requires transparency and good governance, full involvement of all major groups in society, especially women, youth, indigenous people, business and industry and non-governmental organizations.

The path to the new era must involve radically changed patterns of development. In this regard, many small island developing States have already undertaken efforts at the national and regional levels as part of the process towards sustainable development - that is, development which meets present needs without jeopardizing the welfare of future generations, development which does not undermine the environment on which all life depends.

However, small island States recognize that they cannot be "islands unto themselves". In this interdependent world based on a single interacting and interconnected ecosystem, action by them alone will not suffice. Many of the threats to the global environment, and hence to the survival of small island developing States, have their origin in the industrialized world. The international community has already acknowledged a responsibility for direct and indirect actions to facilitate the efforts of small island developing States and to minimize stress on their fragile ecosystems. This recognition and the need for cooperative action, for partnership, was a major outcome of, and point of departure at, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Small islands are home to some of the most important and diverse elements of the Earth's life support system. With the coming into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, small island States bear responsibility for approximately one fifth of the world's oceans and seas, containing some of the world's few remaining reserves of fish stocks. As a group, they contain a high proportion, relative to their area, of different species of flora and fauna, different ecosystems and a large variety of cultures. For example, the coral reef ecosystems, characteristic of most small islands, contain a wide array of bio-diverse resources and are important in sustaining the delicate balance of life on the planet. The natural beauty and serenity of island environments also provide for all peoples of the world some of the few remaining opportunities to experience our planet in its pristine state.

As was recognized at the Earth Summit, small islands are, however, among the most ecologically fragile and vulnerable ecosystems. Likewise, they are extremely economically vulnerable. Given their small size, there is usually a strong reliance on a few, if not only one, economic resource and heavy dependence on international trade without the means of influencing the terms of that trade. Economic vulnerability, in turn, constrains the ability of small island developing States to maintain and conserve the parts of the planet's life systems for which they are responsible. The financial, human and physical reserves of small island developing States are very limited. Their small size and relatively long distances from major centres of commerce mean that the cost of providing essential basic services such as shelter, health, education, transportation and communications are considerably higher in small island developing States than in larger countries. Small island developing States have little margin for error. They are characterized by a very high degree of stress on the environment, both from the pressures of economic and human development activity on limited land area and from limited capacity to absorb or to recover quickly from disasters such as typhoons, storm surges, floods, earthquakes and pollution, and even though small island developing States as a group have been among the least significant contributors, they are on the front line of the effects of global warming, climate change and sealevel rise. In a similar vein, the culture of small island developing States, one of their distinct characteristics and very special contributions to humankind, is also now severely threatened.

Life on small island developing States is thus both an alluring experience and a profound challenge.

The Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States here in Barbados has provided the first opportunity to put into practice the agreements of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in the specific context of small island developing States. The Conference has brought together representatives of ___ States Members of the United Nations, of ___ Non-Self-Governing Territories, of ___ regional and international organizations and of ___ non-governmental organizations. The Conference has evoked the commitment of all these groups to build a new and equitable partnership for the sustainable development of small island developing States as captured in the Programme of Action.

The Programme of Action adopted at the Conference recognized the need for small island developing States to increase their rate of economic activity in order to meet essential human needs and to improve the quality of life for island peoples. It also recognized that, increasingly, economic activities of small island developing States must be internally generated and therefore based on the careful management and rational utilization of their bio-diverse resources, their marine and coastal resources, and their cultural attributes. The Programme of Action is based on commitments and undertakings by the Governments of small island developing States, by the non-governmental organizations, including the private sector in small island developing States, and by the wider international community.

Small island developing States have committed themselves to ensure that social and economic activities of the public and private sectors are effected in a sustainable manner, to put in place mechanisms, including legislation, institutions and infrastructure, which will advance the process of sustainable development, and to provide information and create in their populations greater awareness of the importance and fragility of their ecosystems. They have agreed to strengthen communication and information exchange between and among themselves and to continue the building of capacity to assess and provide solutions to the unique problems of small island developing States.

[Commitment of non-governmental organizations]

The international community has declared its commitment to support and facilitate small island developing States in their quest for sustainable development. To this end, the international community has committed itself to provide new, additional and predictable financial and other resources necessary for the implementation of the Programme of Action; to enhance indigenous capacity through the promotion of greater access to and transfer of environmentally sound technologies appropriate for the sustainable development of small island developing States; to support the establishment of adequate institutional mechanisms, particularly at the regional and international levels; to promote an economic and trading environment supportive of the sustainable development of small island developing States; to facilitate the development of indicators which meaningfully characterize the vulnerabilities and peculiarities of small island developing States; and to mitigate sources of global environmental threats.

The Programme of Action which has been adopted, taken together with the commitments of Governments, non-governmental organizations and the international community as a whole, therefore represents a landmark in the further evolution of Agenda 21. This positive experience should be useful to the international community as it seeks progressively to effect the transition globally to sustainable development. The real test of shared commitment, however, will be in the effective and vigorous implementation of the Programme of Action.

The example of the Conference will therefore send a powerful message to the world's peoples on the untold possibilities of joint action undertaken with a sense of common purpose, and with the clear and simple objective of humankind embarking irrevocably on the journey to sustainable development.